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**COLOMBIAN DRUG LORD - FIRST EVER EXTRADITED - PLEADS
GUILTY ON EVE OF TRIAL IN FEDERAL COURT IN MANHATTAN**

JAMES B. COMEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that ALBERTO ORLANDE GAMBOA, alias "Caracol," the first Colombian drug lord extradited from Colombia to the United States since Colombia resumed extraditing its citizens in December of 1997, pled guilty before United States District Judge THOMAS P. GRIESA in Manhattan federal court today to charges involving massive conspiracies to import tens of thousands of kilograms of cocaine from Colombia to the United States, and to launder the hundreds of millions of dollars in profits generated by the sale of that cocaine.

According to the Indictment, the Government's recitation of the evidence at the plea proceeding, and papers filed in the District Court and in the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, GAMBOA used a penchant for violence and the enormous proceeds of his criminal conduct to consolidate his control over drug trafficking routes along Colombia's Caribbean coast.

Between 1990 and 1999, and including two separate periods spent

in pre-trial detention in Colombia on charges of murder and kidnapping, GAMBOA led a cartel of approximately a dozen large-scale traffickers in Barranquilla, Colombia, who collectively smuggled more than 100,000 pounds of cocaine worth over a billion dollars to the United States and third countries.

The jury selection process in GAMBOA's trial began on Wednesday, March 5, 2003, when a panel of prospective jurors was summoned to federal court in Manhattan to complete juror questionnaires. The trial was scheduled to begin today.

Documents filed in the District Court reveal that GAMBOA and his associates used numerous drug smuggling methods - including ocean-going cargo ships, airplanes and speedboats - to ship cocaine from Colombia and Venezuela's north coasts to various destinations in the United States. According to the Indictment, GAMBOA and his organization transported huge amounts of cocaine first to various Caribbean destinations, and then on to Puerto Rico. Also according to the Indictment, from Puerto Rico they transported much of that cocaine to the New York City metropolitan area and Philadelphia in commercial airline and maritime cargo.

According to documents and exhibits filed in the District Court, GAMBOA and his organization also imported large quantities of cocaine directly to the United States from ports in South America by concealing that cocaine in containers shipped to various ports in Florida. According to the same court papers,

the cocaine - shipped hundreds of kilograms at a time - was secreted either in legitimate merchandise or in the walls of the containers themselves.

According to the Indictment and to papers filed in the District Court, between early 1995 and late 1998 alone, law enforcement investigations in several U.S. jurisdictions seized huge quantities of GAMBOA's cocaine, including:

- 459 kilograms of cocaine concealed inside a shipping container of detergent, seized by the U.S. Customs Service at Port Newark, New Jersey, on February 1, 1996;
- 539 kilograms of cocaine concealed inside a container of avocados, seized by the U.S. Customs Service at Port Newark, New Jersey on February 2, 1996;
- 564 kilograms of cocaine located in and near a stash apartment used by GAMBOA's organization, seized by the Yonkers Police Department in Yonkers, New York, on September 20, 1996;
- 530 kilograms of cocaine located in a stash house used by GAMBOA's organization, seized by the Drug Enforcement Administration ("DEA") in Rio Piedra, Puerto Rico, on November 21, 1996;
- 120 kilograms of cocaine seized from a member of one of GAMBOA's transportation groups in San Juan, Puerto Rico, by the DEA on November 21, 1996;
- 245 kilograms of cocaine seized in a penthouse apartment used by GAMBOA's organization in Miami Beach, Florida, by the DEA on November 21, 1996;
- 322 kilograms of cocaine located in a stash house used by GAMBOA's organization in Queens, New York, seized by the DEA on November 21, 1996;
- 233 kilograms of cocaine concealed inside a container

of corn oil, seized by the United States Customs Service in Newark, New Jersey, on November 29, 1996;

- 95 kilograms of cocaine concealed in commercial airline passenger luggage seized at the airport in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, by the DEA on April 21, 1998; and
- 25 kilograms of cocaine seized from a member of one of GAMBOA's transportation groups in the vicinity of 34th Street in Manhattan, by members of a joint NYPD/DEA Task Force on April 21, 1998.

The Indictment alleged that GAMBOA and his organization used various methods to launder the hundreds of millions of dollars in illegal gains from their cocaine importation and trafficking operations. Those methods included converting the cash proceeds of their drug sales into money orders, which were then shipped by overnight delivery to locations in the United States and Colombia; purchasing properties, businesses, and assets around the world; and using black market currency exchanges. On other occasions, GAMBOA simply shipped bulk quantities of United States currency to South America. According to papers and exhibits filed in the District Court, in May 1998, for example, the United States Customs Service seized more than \$11 million of GAMBOA's cash hidden in hollowed-out truck transmissions packed in a shipping container and destined for Venezuela from Port Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Other cash seizures attributed to GAMBOA and his organization include:

- Approximately \$715,232 in U.S. currency seized from co-conspirators in Lodi, New Jersey, on June 8, 1998;
- Approximately \$600,839 in money orders seized from an apartment in the Bronx, New York, on December 10, 1998;
- Approximately \$378,344 in U.S. currency seized from an apartment in Brooklyn, New York, on January 16, 1999; and
- Approximately \$956,380 in U.S. currency seized from a home in Miami Lakes, Florida, on January 16, 1999.

GAMBOA's guilty plea comes on the heels of a decision by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit that rejected GAMBOA's argument that statements he made to Colombian prosecutors in connection with charges there prior to his extradition to the United States could not be used against him at his upcoming trial in New York. GAMBOA had successfully argued in the District Court that those statements could not be used against him at his trial in the United States because they were plea discussions and therefore inadmissible under a rule of evidence that precludes the use of plea discussions at trial. The Government appealed the ruling, and a unanimous panel of three judges of the Court of Appeals reversed the District Court, holding that evidence of plea discussions with foreign prosecutors were not covered by the applicable rule of evidence.

In those statements, which were filed with the District Court and the Court of Appeals, GAMBOA - in an effort to avoid

extradition by pleading guilty in Colombia - admitted to a decade of drug trafficking, providing detailed description of his trafficking routes, his money laundering operations and his co-conspirators both in Colombia and in the United States. Further, days before his August 18, 2000, extradition GAMBOA issued a statement, titled "Declaration to My Colombian People," which was sent to - and published by - Cambio Magazine, a Colombian weekly news magazine. In that statement, GAMBOA stated:

"Yes, it is true that I was a drug trafficker and yes, among drug traffickers there are lords, as I know there are. I consider myself among the first ten. And, yes, I might have made a mistake by getting into drug trafficking, but I have never lost my principles of a good person."

GAMBOA's conviction today stems from a five year-long investigation led by the Drug Enforcement Administration in conjunction with the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, which is comprised of law enforcement officers from the United States Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Customs Service, the Internal Revenue Service, the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the New York City Police Department.

Mr. COMEY praised the investigative efforts of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Customs Service, the Organized Crime Drug

Enforcement Task Force and the Colombian National Police.

GAMBOA is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge GRIESA on
May 27, 2003 at 9:30 A.M.

Assistant United States Attorneys MARK F. MENDELSON
and ROBERTO FINZI are in charge of the prosecution.

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